

Chapter 3.22

Technical Aspects of Knowledge Management: A Methodology for Commercial Knowledge Management Tool Selection

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ABSTRACT

One of the repercussions of the ever-rising popularity of knowledge management is a sudden increase in the number and range of knowledge management tools available on the software market. This can present a problem for organisations that are required to sift through the vast number of tools in the hope of finding one that meets their requirements. Moreover, guidelines describing how to go about selecting a commercial knowledge management tool do not currently exist. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to present a set of guidelines to aid the evaluation and selection of a commercial knowledge management tool. In order

to achieve this, a methodology is proposed that outlines factors and issues that could be taken into consideration during the selection of a knowledge management tool. Furthermore, an overview of criteria specific to knowledge management tools that can be used to evaluate and ascertain the features present in a knowledge management tool are also suggested.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management has attracted a great deal of interest in the past few years. However, this appears to have focused on the organisa-

tional and human aspects (Davenport, 1996). The technical aspect of knowledge management has been acknowledged, but few academic studies have ventured beyond this point. While research efforts have been centred on the organisational and human issues of knowledge management, software vendors have been busy bombarding the market with various knowledge management tools. Consequently, an overwhelming number of knowledge management tools exist on the software market (Angus et al., 1998; Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Silver, 2000). This is not immediately perceived as being problematic since the greater the choice, the more competitive and dynamic the market. However, the overwhelming alternatives can make it difficult for organisations to select a suitable knowledge management tool that adequately meets their requirements. This is further complicated by the fact that, while some of these tools have been designed specifically as knowledge management tools, others have been re-packaged, re-labelled and re-marketed as knowledge management tools (Angus et al., 1998). Other disciplines and even areas within information systems and computing have overcome this problem by creating a set of guidelines that aid the selection of suitable software tools. In light of this, it appears feasible to provide a similar facility for knowledge management tools.

Therefore, the motivation for this research stems from the lack of guidelines available for the selection of knowledge management tools. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate a methodology that has been designed to aid the selection of a commercial knowledge management tool. The chapter begins by demonstrating how knowledge management tools fit into the broader context of knowledge management. Following this is an illustration of the methodology and a description of how it was designed. A part of the methodology involves the evaluation of candidate knowledge management tools. Therefore, an evaluation framework that could be used to achieve this is also described. The chapter concludes by

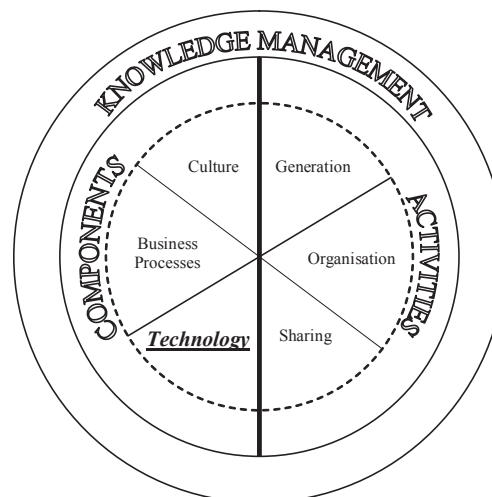
reflecting on the methodology and discussing further work in this area.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT TOOLS IN CONTEXT

The area of knowledge management has been subjected to a great deal of controversy with regards to the lack of a common definition or concept. However, there does appear to be some consistency in relation to the components and the activities, often referred to as processes, which constitute knowledge management. This research can be classified under the 'Technology' component of knowledge management which is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows that knowledge management consists of two areas —knowledge management activities and knowledge management components. The former, knowledge management activities, is divided into the three areas of knowledge generation, knowledge organisation and knowledge sharing. These represent the primary activities that can take place, either in

Figure 1. Knowledge management activities and components



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